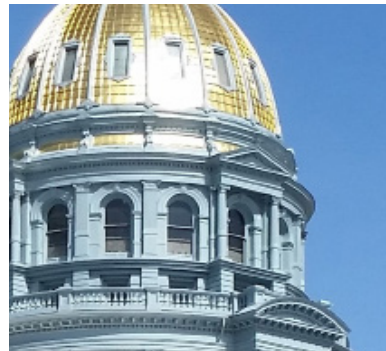


2021

Report to the Colorado General Assembly



Early Childhood and School Readiness



Prepared by Legislative Council Staff
Research Publication No. 770
December 2021

Early Childhood and School Readiness Legislative Commission

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December 2021

To Members of the Seventy-second General Assembly:

Submitted herewith is the final report of the Early Childhood and School Readiness Legislative Commission. This commission was created pursuant to Section 26-6.5-203, Colorado Revised Statutes. The purpose of this commission is to study issues related to early childhood and school readiness in order to improve the state's early childhood policies.

At its meeting on November 15, 2021 the Legislative Council reviewed the report of this committee. A motion to forward this report and the bill therein for consideration in the 2022 session was approved.

Sincerely,

/s/ Senator Leroy Garcia
Chair

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This report is also available online at:

<https://leg.colorado.gov/committees/early-childhood-and-school-readiness-legislative-commission/2021-regular-session>

Committee Charge

Pursuant to state law (Section 26-6.5-203, C.R.S.), the Early Childhood and School Readiness Legislative Commission (ECSRLC) may meet up to four times per year to study issues concerning early childhood and school readiness. Additional meetings may be added as needed through legislation. Topics to be studied include: health care, mental health, parental involvement, family support, child care, and early learning. The commission is required to solicit input from the public, especially from those who have expertise in early childhood and school readiness issues. The commission is also required to consult with the Early Childhood Leadership Commission, which is a group focused on improving outcomes for young children from birth to age eight, to discuss policy concerning early childhood and school readiness.

Committee Activities

The committee held five meetings during the 2021 interim, the standard four meetings, plus one as required under House Bill 21-1304. Presentations were made by state departments, early childhood professionals, members of the nonprofit and advocacy communities, and members of the public on a wide range of subjects related to early childhood and school readiness, including:

- early child care and education access and affordability;
- Department of Early Childhood transition planning;
- early child care workforce recruitment and retention;
- mental health in early childhood and the child care workforce; and
- community and family strengthening efforts.

The following subsections discuss the ECSRLC's activities during the 2021 interim.

Early Child Care and Education Access and Affordability

The commission heard from representatives from the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) in the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS), Early Milestones Colorado, the Colorado Children's Campaign, Executives Partnering to Invest in Children, Mile High United Way, Council for Strong America, and the Common Sense Institute on the current landscape of early child care in Colorado and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Presenters discussed the need to improve access to high-quality and affordable early care and education for all families, the impacts of a decline in licensed child care infant capacity, and the consequences of limited access to quality early care and education on children, families, and the economy. One presenter highlighted the negative impact of the lack of access to child care on women in the workforce. The commission also heard a report on home-based child care in Colorado and was briefed on the results of a statewide survey on Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) care.

Department of Early Childhood Transition Planning

Representatives from the Early Childhood Leadership Commission spoke to the commission about the transition planning process for the new Department of Early Childhood created by House Bill 21-1304. The presenters focused on the transition timeline, stakeholder engagement process, guiding principles, and recommendations for the structure of the new department. The presenters also gave an overview of the next steps for the transition, including providing recommendations for the universal preschool program and its integration into the new department, as well as upcoming opportunities for stakeholder engagement.

Early Child Care Workforce Recruitment and Retention

The commission heard from representatives from the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE), OEC, directors of family child care homes and child care centers, and an FFN care advocate on early childhood workforce development initiatives, the need to use state and federal stimulus funding to support the early care and education workforce, and the importance of training and support for FFN providers. Presenters and the commission discussed issues facing the early childhood workforce, including staff shortages, difficulty filling vacant positions, low wages, low retention rates, high demand for child care spots, and workforce capacity building efforts. In particular, they discussed the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the early child care workforce. CDHE presented on their work to increase the number of credentialed early child care providers through a multi-partner grant.

Committee recommendations. As a result of its discussions, the committee recommended Bill A, which concerns an income tax credit for qualified early childhood educators.

Mental Health in Early Childhood and the Child Care Workforce

Representatives from CDHS, Healthy Child Care Colorado, Right Start for Colorado, and mental health consultants and providers spoke to the commission about early childhood mental health programs, strategies, and supports. Early childhood mental health care encompasses the mental health of children, parents, and child care providers. The commission members learned about the Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation program, a service connecting early childhood programs and mental health consultants to improve the overall development and mental health of children and caregivers. The commission also learned about the investments, supports, and services that are needed across the infant and early childhood mental health continuum, and heard about the importance of establishing strong social-emotional mental health early in life to set children up for success in grade school and beyond. Finally, the commission learned more about the mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children, families, and child care providers.

Community and Family Strengthening Efforts

Representatives from the Family Resource Center Association and the Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance spoke to the commission about their work providing services and supports to families throughout the state by using comprehensive, coordinated case management and acting as a

family-friendly access point by tailoring the centers to the culture and needs of each community. The commission also heard preliminary recommendations from the Safe Child Care Task Force and learned about the Home Visiting Investment Plan. The Home Visiting Investment Plan focuses on providing culturally and linguistically appropriate home visiting services, as well as other family strengthening support services. The goal of home visitation services is to improve parental and child mental health, child physical health, and positive parenting practices, reduce child maltreatment or abuse, and decrease domestic violence.

Summary of Recommendations

As a result of the committee's activities, the committee recommended one bill to the Legislative Council for consideration in the 2022 session. At its meeting on November 15, 2021, the Legislative Council approved the recommended bill for introduction. The approved bill is described below.

Bill A — Early Childhood Tax Credit

The bill creates a refundable income tax credit for early childhood educators who have an adjusted gross income of less than or equal to \$75,000 for a single return or \$85,000 for a joint, has held an early childhood professional credential for at least 6 months, and is the licensee of an eligible early childcare program or employed by an eligible program for at least 6 months. The credit can be claimed from January 1, 2022, through January 1, 2027. Credit amounts include:

- \$500 for an Early Childcare Professional I, IV, V, and VI;
- \$750 for an Early Childcare Professional II; and
- \$1,000 for an Early Childcare Professional III.

After January 1, 2023, the Department of Revenue (DOR) must adjust the amount of the credit by inflation. The CDHS must provide DOR with an electronic report of each individual who held an early childhood professional credential each year.

Resource Materials

Meeting summaries are prepared for each meeting of the committee and contain all handouts provided to the committee. The summaries of meetings and attachments are available at the Division of Archives, 1313 Sherman Street, Denver (303-866-2055). The listing below contains the dates of committee meetings and the topics discussed at those meetings. Meeting summaries are also available on our website at:

<https://leg.colorado.gov/content/committees>

Meeting Date and Topics Discussed

August 10, 2021

- Update from the Early Childhood Leadership Commission on the planning for the Universal Preschool Program and the new Department of Early Childhood.
- Update from the Office of Early Childhood, including on the transition to universal preschool and the use of federal relief funding.
- Presentations on the landscape of early child care in Colorado and the impacts of COVID-19 from the following organizations:
 - ◆ Early Milestones;
 - ◆ Executives Partnering to Invest in Children (EPIC);
 - ◆ Colorado Children’s Campaign;
 - ◆ Mile High United Way; and
 - ◆ Common Sense Institute.

September 8, 2021

- Update from the Department of Higher Education on the early childhood educator workforce outlook.
- Presentation from the Council for Strong America on home-base child care.
- Presentations from the Colorado Association of Family Child Care and ABC Child Development Center on the on-the-ground experience for child care providers.
- Presentation from the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition on the family, friend, and neighbor care workforce
- Update from the Safe Child Care Task Force.
- Presentation from Home Visiting Investment Task Force and the Office of Early Childhood on the Home Visiting Investment Plan.

- Panel presentation on community and family strengthening efforts in the early childhood space.
- Panel presentation on mental health in early childhood and the early child care workforce.

September 20, 2021

- Updates from the Office of Early Childhood on the early childhood workforce.
- Updates from the Office of Early Childhood on their support of family, friend, and neighbor care.
- Presentation from the Office of Early Childhood on the return on investment of family resource centers.
- Presentations from the Department of Education on the early child care workforce and school readiness.
- Consideration of bill draft requests.

November 1, 2021

- Presentation from the Bell Policy Center and Brodsky Research and Consulting on the true costs of delivering early childhood education in Colorado.
- Presentations on the principles of ideal learning and ideal learning environments.
- Update from Executives Partnering to Invest in Children (EPIC) on the Employer Based Child Care Grant Program.
- Final approval of bill drafts.

November 18, 2021

- Presentation by the Transition Working Group on the Department of Early Childhood Transition Plan Report